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**LA MODE**

From the painting by Albert Lynch

## THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RÔLE OF FASHION

**F**ASHION is a social custom, transmitted by imitation or by tradition. It is a form of luxury, luxury in ornamentation. Voltaire says:

"There is a fickle, teasing goddess  
Fantastic in her tastes, playful in adornment,  
Who at every season seems to flee, return, and  
rise again.  
Proteus was her father, her name is Fashion."

Many writers have sounded the caprices of fashion, its frequent coming, its suddenness. It is changeable,\* unreliable, frivolous; the most careful calculations are often brushed aside for the most trifling causes. Another characteristic is its universal following. Domineering, it reigns supreme over all classes of society. While this "democracy of fashion" is quite recent, yet the taste for finery is as old as the world.

An English archeologist, Mr. Evans, found in the Mycenæan palace of Knossos in Crete some frescoes painted 1,400 years before our era, showing ladies of the court clothed in resplendent garments, with enormous leg-of-mutton sleeves held to the neck by a narrow ribbon; their flounced skirts, ornamented with embroidered bands, are expanded behind by enormous bustles.

Writings and monuments tell us that under the Empire changes of fashion and peculiarity in costumes were customary

\* "One fashion has hardly brushed aside another when it is abolished by a new one and this in turn gives way to one which follows, but this one will not be the last."—La Bruguère. "The new style of dressing makes the older fashion out of date, so forcefully and with such general agreement that it might be called a kind of mania which turns the senses round."—Montaigne.

at Rome. During the Middle Ages, an author of the twelfth century wrote: "France, whose humor varies continuously, ought to have some garments which would proclaim her instability." In the fifteenth century Robert Gaguin reproached Parisians "for always being eager for novelties and unable to retain the same style of clothing for ten successive years."

Until the thirteenth century women's costumes were chiefly tunics or robes, marked by plain and natural simplicity. It was only toward the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, under Francis I and Henry II, that dresses were designed following the lines of the body. Women then appeared with fitted doublets, skirts, and wraps with collars. The sleeves were leg-of-mutton and balloon-shaped, filled with plaits, or very tight, and these shapes often have been imitated in our day. This was the starting point of fashion which will sleep only for perpetual reawakening, making evolutions in irregular cycles at the will of its creators. Under Henry III we find the pointed waist, held in place by a stiff corset, the puffed sleeves; the dress already had the hoop-petticoat which fashion revived again in 1830.

The reign of Henry IV brought us the great bell skirt, built on springs, which we find later with the crinoline. This tendency toward fullness in the skirt kept increasing until 1605, bringing some dresses to enormous proportions, with ruffles adding to their size. Then, toward the end of the seventeenth century the fullness diminished, giving way to padded

dresses, concealed under mantle wraps, and in 1880 they reappeared again. Reduction in the size of the skirt continued until about 1750, when fullness again came into fashion, and by 1785 the skirts were ridiculously full, expanded with great hoops. There was another reaction and the hoop-skirt gave way first to the bustle, then in 1793 came the one-piece dress, with a running string and without ornamentation. Greek robes were seen at fêtes and on the stage. The Directoire dress, very close-fitting, exaggerated the plaited style and resembled the trousers skirt of recent date. The Empire costume, with the waist high under the bosom, was only another transformation of the Directoire dress, showing at that time a tendency to fullness in the form.

After 1805 the cycles began to shorten, the wheel turned faster, and without stopping, until we find a general style used by all classes of society. Skirts were worn very full again toward 1810 and, passing through all sorts of gradations, with a partial return of fullness in the back, ended in 1860 to 1865 in the culminating point of the crinoline. This marks the departure from Orientalism and brings us toward the epoch when very simple and straight robes were worn until we reach the other extreme, the clinging gown, not forgetting the harem skirt, an exaggerated revised edition of the eccentricities of the period from 1805 to 1815. We must pause to resume slowly but surely the march toward the puffed or padded styles.

How is fashion created? Since the days of Worth in 1846, it has been the well-known modiste who has been the creating artist. His popularity is such that it has become a regular habit to visit his establishment, and as Pierre Mille says, "he knows how to make the worldly

mind dress and how to prattle," as shown by Gervex's painting, "chez Paquin à cinq heures." The modiste seeks out the designs, fits the forms, harmonizes the lines and styles. Each establishment decides upon a model and then selection is made from public opinion expressed at the great gatherings at Auteuil and Longchamp. Each modiste has a representative there and in broad daylight they make comparisons, listen to criticisms, make after-touches, and the "complete results of the races" told in the Paris evening papers omit the most striking act of the day: Fashion was born and a humble seamstress may have had the chance to invent it.

The fashion created, there is haste to make it known, to launch it. Under the monarchical régimes and under the First and Second Empires, the court fulfilled that duty and gave fashion some distinction. It is only since the First Republic, or particularly since the Third Republic, that the prevailing style has been anything more than the reflection of the will of the sovereign, whose ideas and customs had the force of law. Under the First Empire Josephine abhorred a stiff style of garment; she preferred the low-neck gown with high waist and flexible skirt; her hair arranged with the bandeau. Roman art then ruled, brought about by Josephine. Empress Eugénie had like influence under the Second Empire, and to her we owe the taste for a comfortable style and stuffed, silk-covered furniture.

To-day the style is made public by manequins at the race course, on the street, at the theater, by actors on the stage, and by such social functions as a wedding or a ball. The fashion at the theater seems to be playing an increasing rôle. Fashionable modistes have recently announced their intention of having their manequins replaced by actresses, who on

the stage, by their grace, their elegance, their beauty, their prestige, would tend to a more ready acceptance of fashion's extravagant innovations. Madame Jane Hading, in the play of "L'Attentat," introduced the dress known as the "aile de cabteau" or winged pannier. And Madame Martha Brandès created the style of sleeves since known by her name. When *La Walkyrie* was first presented at the opera, white wings like those attached to Brunhilde's helmet were worn on hats, and the armor of the warlike maiden gave to dressmakers the idea of spangled robes, much resembling the breastplate. The use of pheasant plumage became more general after the presentation of *Chanteclair*. We already had the "Dame Blanche" fichus, and the Lutheran bonnet was popular after *Les Huguenots* was played.

Any striking idea may inspire a fashion. Under Louis-Philippe "all the fashionable young men of the capital wanted their trousers plaited at the hips like those of the African chasseurs; they had their turbans and their Arab checias (skull caps) at their homes." *Trocadero* ribbons became the rage as a souvenir of the voyage of the Duke of Angoulême to Spain, and the Russo-Japanese War gave us the kimono. It is to the passion for sports that we owe the English styles, the success of the tailor-made costume, the fashion for furs and leather garments, and also that "war hat" attempted by some Americans.

Literature also has been a great inspiration, as shown by the curious and interesting book of Louis Maigron on "*Romantisme et la Mode*." The essential characteristic of the romantist revolution was the return to national tradition, the style of the Middle Ages, which forced itself quickly and in every direction, taking the place of the Empire style. Accord-

ing to Mons. Maigron, "romanticism creeps from books into the daily life through social diversions." The masquerade thus makes some pretensions, often justified, of reconstructing history; old engravings are appealed to for aid in costuming.

The works of Victor Hugo, especially *Hernani*, have had an influence on fashion as great as pre-Raphaelism has to-day on gowns and hairdressing. The use of white muslins was the inspiration of Tagliani, as were the "waves of the Danube" taffetas. The "Atala" collars and the "Marie Stuart" hats were successively worn. The "battlement" hat was designed in part from a headdress looked upon as that of Jeanne d'Arc, and likewise the "leg-of-mutton" sleeve recalls the costume of the sixteenth century.

There is a complete revolution in the work of gold- and silver-smiths. Jewelry is made in the shape of pointed arches with knights in steel armor, pages with plumed toques, helmets, grey-hounds, coats-of-arms, escutcheons. A complete feudal arsenal is designed in chased work and enamels. In architecture the Gothic comes into full vogue, and it is constantly the romance styles which are most fashionable.

The red waistcoat of Theophile Gautier had its imitators; the waistcoat was at one time the chief thought of young Frenchmen. It is all a program that one cultivates and lives up to. Men's fashions extend to lace facings, braids, furs, Merovingian style of hair, and whiskers of an Assyrian king; the cravat is of a gloomy black.

It is this individualism directing the present style, this instability, the changing at every season, which helps Paris in great measure to maintain its leading influence on fashion, and this is not of recent origin. Isabel of Bavaria, in 1391, and Anne of Brittany, in 1496, sent to

the queens of England and Spain dolls dressed in the latest style. During the war of the succession in Spain the courts of Versailles and St. James accorded safe conduct to the alabaster doll which accredited the newest fashions from the other side of the Channel.

It is Paris that "decrees the sumptuary law of nations," it is she that sells the models, and the best advertisement of a foreign modiste is to announce her "return from Paris." One can understand that this advantage would be envied outside of France, and they have tried, especially in the United States, to wrest it from her. These attempts have not ceased. It can readily be seen that there is involved in this the question of a convenient center which is not found elsewhere. Copying styles is so very easy that a committee of defense of Parisian fashions has been formed, which has brought about a closer connection between the release of models and the opening of the season, and there has been adopted a stamp of origin, furnished by the syndics of needlework.

While we have spoken up to this point simply of clothing and hairdressing, we should not think that this is the limit of fashion's domain. It controls conversation, the manner of walking, how to shake hands. Such a word as "épatant" (stunning) owes to fashion its recent admittance to the "Dictionary of the Academy." The general use of such a drink as tea, the abandonment of wine in certain circles, vegetarianism, may all be regarded as fashions, likewise the adoption of some state of the mind which takes the lead at times, as sensitiveness or calmness. We have already spoken of architecture and furniture. The passion for traveling and for sports becomes widespread; there is less taste for home; there is less desire for books and interior ornaments.

The influence of fashion is reflected also on the sales of works of art. The great sales recently held in Paris have shown that there is a revival in favor of productions of the eighteenth century. In June, 1912, at a Doucet sale a pastel of "Quentin de la Tour," the portrait of "Duval de l'Epinoy," purchased in 1903 for 5,210 francs (\$1,042), brought 660,000 francs (\$132,000); the "Jardin de la ville d'Este," by Fragonard, which sold for 700 francs (\$140) in 1880, brought 21,300 francs (\$4,226); and the "Sacrifice au Minotaure," by the same painter, for which 5,300 francs (\$1,060) was paid in 1880, was held at 396,000 francs (\$79,200). Such fluctuations, of which we could give many examples, are attributed by M. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu to certain notions, among which fashion forms a large part; the personal satisfaction of connoisseurs, the desire for distinction, snobbishness, which is a grand master in fashionable life, the spontaneous adaptation of art of the eighteenth century to conditions of contemporary life and the development of large fortunes.

Other industries are also answerable to fashion—the fur trade, ornamental plumes, jewelry, toys, and artificial flowers. The style in furs changes every year, from the tippets to the stoles and scarfs of to-day, and the consumption of skins increases in enormous proportions.

Artificial flowers, originating in China, now used more for hats and similar purposes than in decorating rooms, give employment in Paris alone to 10,000 women and 3,000 men, receiving \$2,200,000 in wages, for a production valued at \$6,700,000. The manufacture of toys is regulated almost exclusively by the current demand; it is enough to say that a toy is fashionable. The industrial arts peculiar to the colonies seem again to have come into favor, after having been for a

long time out of style. And it is to fashion that is due the present prosperity in false hair and perfumery trades. Each year 130,000 kilograms of hair are utilized in France, and the importations from China and Japan vary from year to year with change in style, from 8,000 to 16,000 kilograms. The fashion for rouge is as old as the desire of women to look beautiful; in very general use in Roman times, it revived with the Renaissance, when the habit spread even to the nuns. Madame de Sévigné wrote: "Rouge may be regarded as the law and the prophets; it is all Christianity." Rice powder and "crème Simon" have no less success today than has the tinting of the hair. Finally, fashion is advantageous in the constantly increasing love for sports and travel and in the development of industries connected with these, particularly the hotel business.

To follow the fashion becomes not only a pastime, but even a duty; intellects are made frivolous thereby; those who pride themselves in appearing elegant are obliged to make the clothing of themselves a veritable occupation and a study, which assuredly does not tend to elevate the mind, nor does it render them capable of great things.

The appearance of a new style of garment is the visible sign that a transformation is taking place in the intellect, customs, and business of a people. The rise of the Chinese Republic, for instance, led

to doing away with plaited hair and to the adoption of the European costume. Taine wrote this profound sally: "My decided opinion is that the greatest change in history was the advent of trousers. . . . It marked the passage of Greek and Roman civilization to the modern. . . . Nothing is more difficult to alter than a universal and daily custom. In order to take away man's clothes and dress him up again you must demolish and remodel him." It is also an equally philosophical conclusion which M. Louis Bourdeau gives in his interesting "*Histoire de l'habillement et de la parure*": "There where the same style of clothing is used for centuries, as among barbarous peoples, one has the right to say that civilization remains stationary. There, on the other hand, where, as in Europe, garments are subject to continual modifications, one may see evidence of great comfort and rapid progress. . . . Far from being a custom of incurable frivolity, the changes of fashions mark a high civilization, subject to change because it is growing and because it has wide latitude to refine its ideal in proportion as its productions are varied." Again, it is necessary that that versatility and refinement be not turned to extravagance or to impropriety, compromising the reputation for good taste, elegance, and distinction which the fashions of Paris enjoy throughout the entire world.

PAUL CLERGET.

*From Revue Economique Internationale, Brussels.*